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3-5-2007

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### Recommended Citation

"Help and Hope" (2007). *News Releases*. 2199.  
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# University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



## Help and Hope

**03.05.2007 | Students, Service and Giving, Culture and Society** Gina Greenwood returned home in February from her second weeklong volunteer trip to the Gulf Coast with the stark realization that the rebuilding effort in the wake of Hurricane Katrina is far from over.

"Even after 18 months, there is still a monumental amount of work to be done," said Greenwood, operations coordinator in the University of Dayton's residential properties office. "What a blessing and privilege it was to be able to go and serve again. Our team did extensive wall, window and electrical work in the home of an elderly couple. We were able to give them help and hope."

That's why 50 University of Dayton students are giving up their spring break March 11-17 and taking a 14-hour bus ride to hurricane-devastated New Orleans to help Christopher Homes, the housing agency of the Archdiocese of New Orleans that provides affordable housing to low-income residents. They'll clean out muck from homes instead of catching up on sleep or lying on a beach.

"That's as many students as we can take on the bus. We have a waiting list," said Mary Niebler, assistant director of UD's Center for Social Concern, which is coordinating a series of domestic and international service trips for approximately 200 UD students over spring break.

Another 30 University of Dayton law students will follow in their footsteps April 2-6 as part of the Student Hurricane Network - law student volunteers from around the country who are using their professional skills to document damage for insurance purposes and deal with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) issues, among other legal concerns.

"I think what is most amazing is the number of first-year law students who are participating and taking leadership roles in the planning of the trip. First year is notorious for the amount of studying, writing and research that students do as part of normal coursework, and so many first year students have volunteered their time freely," said Molly Buckman, director of Alternative Spring Break for the School of Law.

The students traveling to New Orleans are part of a wave of an estimated half a million volunteers who have come to help since Katrina hit, according to the Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau. They're paying their own way or raising money to cover expenses. Greenwood picked up much of her travel expenses, though UD gave her time off as part of a program that allows faculty and staff up to three weeks of paid leave for volunteering for recovery efforts in the Gulf Coast.

"Words cannot express my gratitude to the University for making Katrina relief a priority and for offering its employees the time off to go. The University of Dayton has, in effect, said, 'Go, be the hands and feet of Jesus.' What a powerful witness and testimony," said Greenwood, who traveled with a group from Mount Zion Church in Beavercreek.

Those who serve echo a common refrain.

"I wanted to help in some way," said Anne Lustig, a junior music therapy major from Carmel, Ind. "I don't want to go home and sit around for a week. There's so much to do, and the people still need help.

"For me, it's the faces of the people you see when you're done. It's a look of extreme gratitude. Through service, you gain so much more than you give."

When Mary Fuson saw the images of devastation on television, "my heart went out," she said. "Giving money is one thing, but rolling up your sleeves and helping others can make more of an impact."

Fuson, a sophomore education major from Terre Haute, Ind., said she's surprised by the slow pace of recovery. "It's amazing how many people are still volunteering their time this long after the hurricane. At the University of Dayton, with the Marianist mentality, we stress service and community. This will be a great opportunity to help others and meet others who value the same things I do -- service and community," she observed.

The University of Dayton's Center for Social Concern has organized nine relief trips to the Gulf Coast in the wake of the nation's largest natural disaster. Another group of students will offer their services in May after the academic year closes.

"We still can't fill all the need," Niebler said.

Why the continued surge of volunteers more than 18 months after the hurricane? "College students have experienced Hurricane Katrina. They see the event and its effects as more a part of their lives, while poverty in other areas is ongoing, everyday," she said. "There are still neighborhoods in New Orleans that haven't been touched at all by the relief effort."

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